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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000750

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SUBJECT: PKK Issue: Update on Violence and Political Developments
(March 1-15, 2007)

REF: ANKARA 486 and previous

(U) Sensitive but unclassified - please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) This is another in a series of periodic reports on PKK violence in Turkey. Our primary sources for these reports are mainstream Turkish press services, such as the Anatolian News Agency, and international wire services. While these are more reliable than most Turkish press sources, they are not necessarily unimpeachable. Another source is the Turkish Armed Forces General Staff (TGS) website which documents contacts/clashes with the PKK. Press services sympathetic to the PKK, such as Neu-Isenburg People's Defense Forces and Firat News Agency, tend to report higher numbers of the Turkish Security Forces casualties and are often otherwise unreliable.

12. (U) During the March 1-15, 2007 period two village guards died in clashes with the PKK in the mountainous regions of Sirnak province on March 9. Two sergeants were injured when they stepped on a PKK land mine in Mardin province on March 1. Clashes occurred between security forces and PKK terrorists Sirnak and Mardin. The bodies of seven PKK terrorists were found during searches in the rural areas of Diyarbakir. Authorities arrested 13 PKK terrorists Sirnak and Hakkari provinces, including four who turned themselves in. Security forces seized booby-trapped land mines, Kalashnikov rifles, drums, cartridges, hand grenades, a pistol, 17 kgs of plastic explosives, night vision binoculars and radios in PKK shelters and caves in the region.

13. (U) Following are political comments by Turkish and Kurdish officials, as well as other developments:

-- TURKISH OFFICIALS:

- Dailies on March 1 quoted Government Spokesman Cemil Cicek as saying that U.S. Secretary of State Rice's reference to "Kurdistan" was "unacceptable." He added that the southern neighbor of Turkey was Iraq. In a statement at a Senate meeting, Rice said PKK was "an organization active at the border between Turkey and Kurdistan," newspapers reported.

- Dailies reported in early March on claims by certain Kurdish politicians that jailed PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was being poisoned by the authorities. "NTV" quoted Deputy Prime Minister Mehmet Ali Sahin March 3 as describing these statements as "provocation."

- March 13 dailies quoted the Bursa prosecutor as stating that the

medical tests have shown that jailed PKK leader has not been poisoned. Medical tests indicated no sign of poisoning. "Tests prove that the poisoning allegations were completely unfounded," the Bursa chief prosecutor's office said in a statement.

- March 11 gave extensive coverage to the strongly worded warnings by Land Forces Commander General Basbug during a visit to Diyarbakir. Basbug said Nevruz festival should be celebrated joyfully by the people but not be turned into a platform for separatist demonstrations. He warned that promulgating terrorist propaganda was crime, and added that carrying symbols of terror organizations or chanting slogans in support of such organizations is also illegal. He stressed that as a sovereign state Turkey could undertake the necessary measures against PKK terrorists in northern Iraq.

-- KURDISH OFFICIALS:

- March 1 dailies reported that at the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party's (DTP) extraordinary convention, co-chair Aysel Tugluk said PKK should be allowed to participate in Turkish politics. At the convention, DTP Chairman Ahmet Turk announced that DTP will seek alliance with other parties or will support independent candidates in parliamentary elections later this year.

- DTP Chairman Turk told "Milliyet" March 15 that "The issue is not the PKK. As long as there is chaos in the Middle East, Turkey does not want to leave aside the Kurdish card that it is holding. Thus, it is not taking a democratic step in the resolution of the Kurdish issue and at the same time trying to prevent an establishment in northern Iraq."

14. (U) Following are selected columns and articles on the topic:

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- In the March 1 "Posta" Mehmet Ali Birand wrote that Washington was putting direct pressure on the PKK and -- indirectly -- Barzani, by insisting that the PKK maintain its ceasefire. Meanwhile, the PKK was considering whether to pursue a political path in Turkey.

- Metehan Demir wrote in "Sabah" March 1 that Ankara prepared a file proving Barzani's relations with the PKK. This file, which Turkey would provide to the U.S., included documents showing that Murat Karayilan appeared on a Barzani-controlled TV on October 26. The report claimed that Barzani was using the PKK as a trump card against Turkey, which was itself concerned with Kurdish efforts to change the demographic structure of Kirkuk.

- In March 15 "Milliyet" Hasan Cemal asked for how long Turkey would continue to use "stick diplomacy" with northern Iraq. He quoted Talabani associate Ahmet Bamarni as complaining to him, "Turkey keeps showing the stick and one is tempted to say, 'Go ahead and give a blow.'" After listing all the reasons why Turkey should not carry out a military operation in northern Iraq, Cemal wondered why Ankara still waving a stick. He concluded that using arms and violence would only obstruct Turkey's march toward the EU.

WILSON